MARVEL

CATES
HENRICHON

387

DOCTOR STRANGE

STAKES IS HIGH

la Flame

POPOPOPO
POPOPOKER

Vegas-Style
ROLL DICE
WITH VILLAINS

STEPHEN STRANGE WAS A PREEMINENT SURGEON UNTIL A CAR ACCIDENT DAMAGED THE NERVES IN HIS HANDS. HIS EGO DROVE HIM TO SCOUR THE GLOBE FOR A MIRACLE CURE. INSTEAD, HE FOUND A MYSTERIOUS WIZARD CALLED THE ANCIENT ONE WHO TAUGHT HIM MAGIC AND THAT THERE ARE THINGS IN THIS WORLD BIGGER THAN HIMSELF. THESE LESSONS ENABLED STEPHEN TO BECOME THE SORCERER SUPREME, EARTH'S FIRST DEFENSE AGAINST ALL MANNER OF MAGICAL THREATS. HIS PATIENTS CALL HIM...

DOCTOR STRANGE

LAST TIME...

STEPHEN STRANGE IS ONCE AGAIN THE SORCERER SUPREME AFTER A BRIEF PERIOD IN WHICH "LORD OF LIES" LOKI HAD TRICKED STEPHEN INTO BELIEVING LOKI WAS THE RIGHTFUL TITLEHOLDER. FOR HIS FIRST ACT BACK IN THE CLOAK, STRANGE WANTED TO REDEEM HIMSELF TO THE WORLD AND THE FRIENDS HE'D DISAPPOINTED. HE RESTORED LAS VEGAS AND THE CITIZENS WHO'D LOST THEIR LIVES DURING HYDRA'S RAID...AND INADVERTENTLY ALLOWED THE MANIFESTATION OF MEPHISTO'S HELLISH *HOTEL INFERNO* ON THE STRIP, RELEASING THE DEMON'S POWER. MEPHISTO OFFERED TO LEAVE IF STRANGE COULD WIN A GAME OF BRIMSTONE BLACKJACK, BUT STEPHEN CHEATED, FORFEITING THE DEAL AND EARNING MEPHISTO'S WRATH, DOLED OUT BY THE NOW-POSSESSED THOR.

THE EVENTS OF THIS ISSUE TAKE PLACE CONCURRENTLY WITH THOSE IN *DOCTOR STRANGE: DAMNATION #2.*

"BLEEDING NEON"
PART TWO

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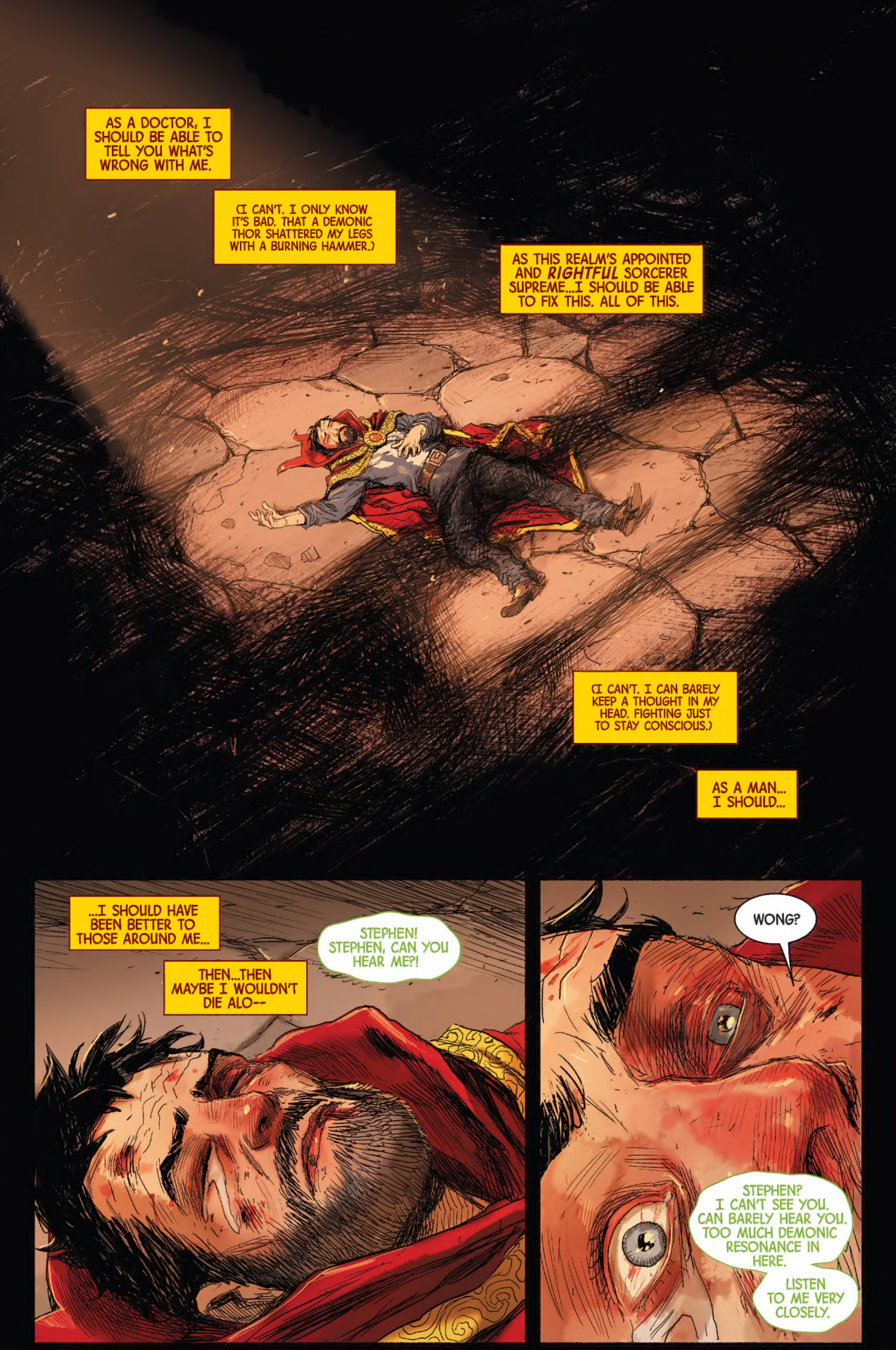
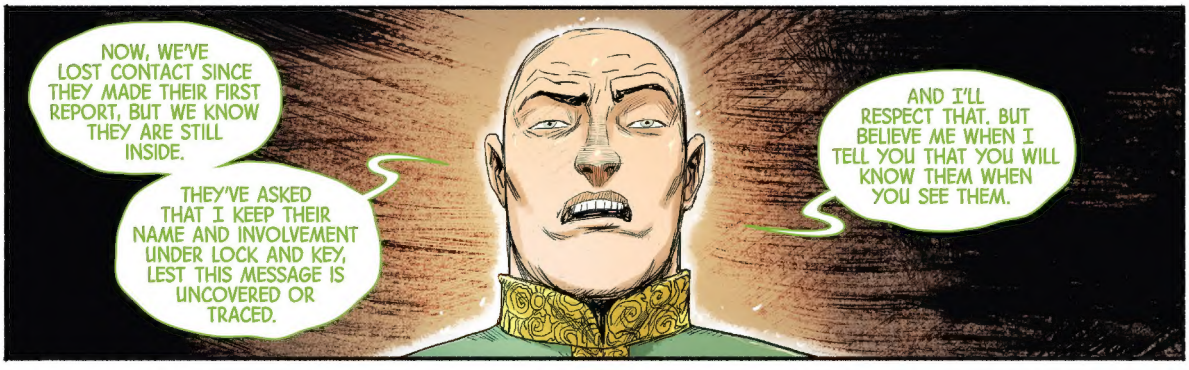

AS A DOCTOR, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL YOU WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME.
(I CAN'T. I ONLY KNOW IT'S BAD. THAT A DEMONIC THOR SHATTERED MY LEGS WITH A BURNING HAMMER.)
AS THIS REALM'S APPOINTED AND RIGHTFUL SORCERER SUPREME...I SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIX THIS. ALL OF THIS.
(I CAN'T. I CAN BARELY KEEP A THOUGHT IN MY HEAD. FIGHTING JUST TO STAY CONSCIOUS.)
AS A MAN... I SHOULD...
...I SHOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO THOSE AROUND ME...
THEN...THEN MAYBE I WOULDN'T DIE ALO--
STEPHEN! STEPHEN, CAN YOU HEAR ME?!
WONG?
STEPHEN? I CAN'T SEE YOU. CAN BARELY HEAR YOU. TOO MUCH DEMONIC RESONANCE IN HERE.
LISTEN TO ME VERY CLOSELY.

"YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
"BATS CAME TO ME. HE TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED. WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.
"I'VE ASSEMBLED A GROUP OF FIGHTERS TO COME AND HELP YOU, STEPHEN.
"YOU SEE, STEPHEN, WHILE YOU'VE BEEN INSIDE THE CASINO DOING GOD KNOWS WHAT, LAS VEGAS HAS QUITE LITERALLY GONE TO HELL.
"ANY SLIGHT SIN, ANY INFRACTION, IS NOW PUNISHABLE BY FORFEIT OF ONE'S SOUL TO MEPHISTO.
"I'M AFRAID THE AVENGERS FOUND THIS OUT THE HARD WAY.
"GHOST RIDER. ELSA BLOODSTONE. VOODOO AND MAN-THING, BLADE, MOON KNIGHT, IRON FIST AND--"
"BUT OUR CREW, WELL, THOSE OF THEM THAT STILL HAVE SOULS WOULDN'T EXACTLY BE THE MOST DESIRABLE ACQUISITIONS FOR EVEN THE LOWLIEST OF DEMONS.
HOTEL INFERNO
"WONG, I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY THEM? THEY'RE ALL--"
"DAMNED OR DEAD? YES, THEY ARE. THAT'S QUITE BY DESIGN.
"IT'S NOT IDEAL, BUT WE HAVE A PLAN. AND WE'RE ON OUR WAY."

ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS BE ON YOUR FEET AND READY TO LEAVE WHEN WE SHOW UP.
CAN YOU DO THAT, STEPHEN?
...
YES.
OKAY. STAY PUT. WE'RE ON OUR WAY. AND... STEPHEN...
BE CAREFUL, OLD FRIEND. THIS ISN'T LIKE THE OTHER TIMES.
WONG, WONG...MY LEGS...I CAN'T...
STEPHEN? CAN YOU STILL HEAR ME?
...PLEASE, HELP...

WONG...
DAMN. OKAY, STEPHEN, ONE MORE THING BEFORE WE ARE CUT OFF ENTIRELY...

WE HAVE SOMEONE ON THE GROUND IN VEGAS.
OH, NO...


NOW, WE'VE LOST CONTACT SINCE THEY MADE THEIR FIRST REPORT, BUT WE KNOW THEY ARE STILL INSIDE.
THEY'VE ASKED THAT I KEEP THEIR NAME AND INVOLVEMENT UNDER LOCK AND KEY, LEST THIS MESSAGE IS UNCOVERED OR TRACED.
AND I'LL RESPECT THAT. BUT BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU THAT YOU WILL KNOW THEM WHEN YOU SEE THEM.

NO! WONG, MEPHISTO SAID SOMETHING ABOUT HAVING "MY GIRL" HERE. IT'S ZELMA, ISN'T IT?
WONG, IF IT'S HER, SHE'S ALREADY BEEN CAPTURED! I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO--
OKAY, STEPHEN. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU ARE STILL THERE...

...BUT KNOW THIS. THE NEXT TIME WE SPEAK, IT SHALL BE FACE-TO-FACE.
AND, WELL, IN CASE THERE IS NO NEXT TIME...I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT--

STEPHEN?!
THIS ISN'T REAL.
...
CLEA?
I'VE DIED. BLED OUT FROM MY WOUNDS AND NOW I'M DEAD.
OH STEPHEN, WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?

THIS... YOU AREN'T REAL.
YES, I AM. WONG SENT ME TO GET A LAY OF THE LAND AND REPORT BACK, BUT...
WELL, I GOT CAPTURED THE SAME AS YOU. THIS IS QUITE THE HORNETS' NEST YOU'VE KICKED, STEPHEN.
NO. NO, THIS IS A TRICK. MEPHISTO IS PLAYING WITH ME, YOU AREN'T--
STEPHEN. LOOK AT ME. LOOK INTO MY EYES.
I AM HERE. WE...ARE HERE. YOU ARE GRAVELY INJURED--YOU AREN'T THINKING CLEARLY. NOW, I CAN HELP YOU.
YOU NEED ME. AND I NEED YOU...
...TO TRUST ME.
THIS...THIS IS BETTER THAN I EVER EXPECTED DEAD TO BE.

CLEA...I HAVE SO MUCH I NEED TO TELL YOU.
I MESSED UP SO BAD. I--I TRIED TO DO GOOD, BUT I--
HUSH. LET ME LOOK AT YOUR LEGS.

THIS IS BAD, STEPHEN.
ALL OF IT. I SAW ALL OF THE...HELL AND DEMONS AND STUFF OUTSIDE. ALSO, I HEARD YOUR CONVERSATION WITH WONG'S ASTRAL FORM.
MEPHISTO SAID "YOUR GIRL" AND YOU THOUGHT I WAS ZELMA, HUH?
THAT'S INTERESTING.

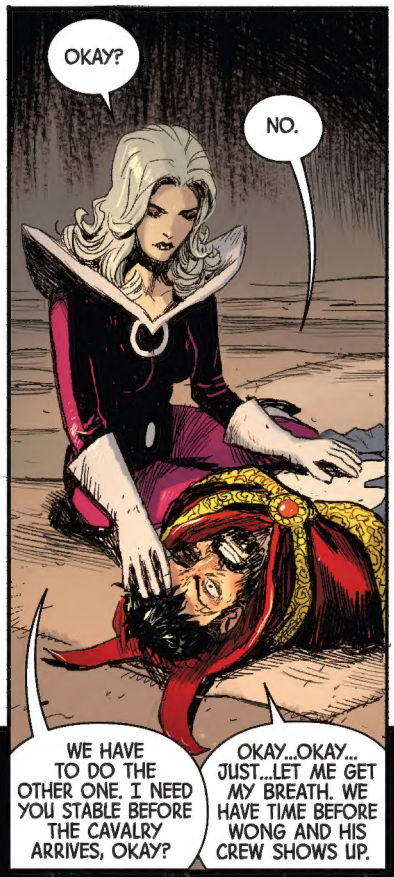
I...NO, NO, YOU MISUNDERSTAND. ZELMA AND I ARE FRIENDS. YOU MET HER, SHE'S...SHE'S...
PRETTY. YOUNG. LOOKS UP TO YOU...

NORMAL. INNOCENT. NOT MY TYPE.
OUCH.
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEANT. YET EVERYONE INSISTS THAT I CANNOT HAVE A PLATONIC RELATIONSHIP WITH...

WAIT. CLEA, WHY ARE YOU BRINGING THIS UP RIGHT NOW?

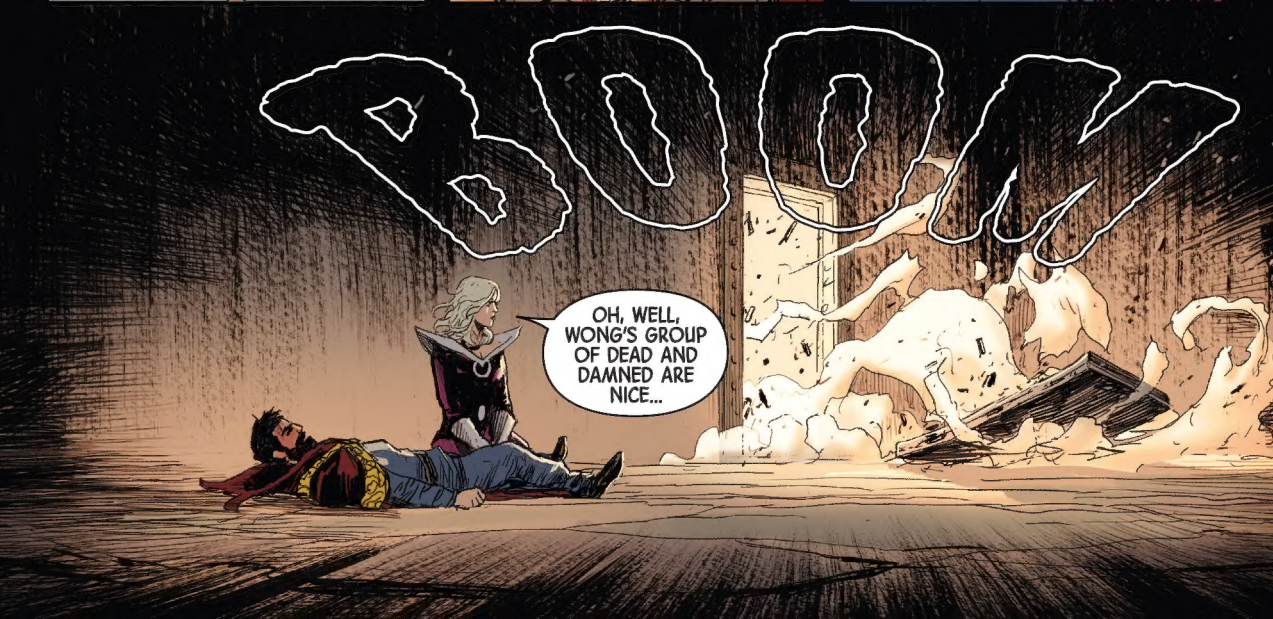
TO DISTRACT YOU FROM SETTING THIS SHATTERED LEG OF YOURS, DOCTOR.
OH, WELL.

AGHH!!!
KR-KRACK


OKAY?
NO.
WE HAVE TO DO THE OTHER ONE. I NEED YOU STABLE BEFORE THE CAVALRY ARRIVES, OKAY?
OKAY...OKAY... JUST...LET ME GET MY BREATH. WE HAVE TIME BEFORE WONG AND HIS CREW SHOWS UP.

SORRY. NOT... UGH...TALKING ABOUT THAT CAVALRY.
KR-KRACK
AGHH!

LIKE I SAID, I'VE BEEN HERE LONGER THAN YOU.
WAIT, WHAT? WHO DID YOU CALL?


BOOM
OH, WELL, WONG'S GROUP OF DEAD AND DAMNED ARE NICE...

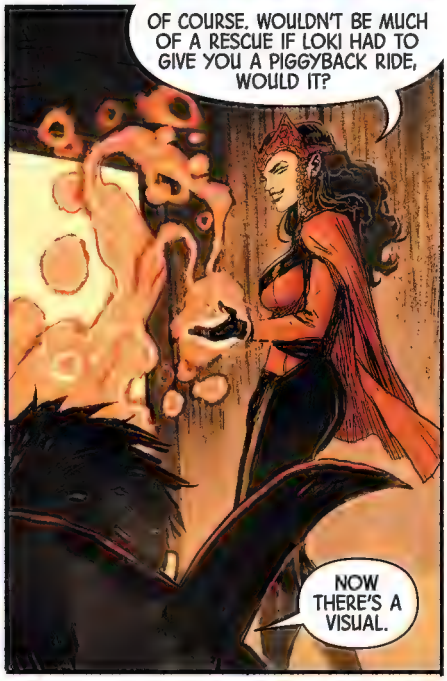
...BUT I CALLED IN THE BIG GUNS.

OH.
GREAT.
LOKI'S HERE.
CLEA, THIS IS INSANE. BRINGING THEM HERE, IT'S--
SOMEONE HAD TO DO SOMETHING.
WE CAN ACTUALLY HEAR YOU SPEAKING.
YEAH, WE'RE... RIGHT HERE. YOU'RE WELCOME, BY THE WAY.
I LITERALLY WARNED YOU ABOUT THIS VERY THING.
DO NOT START IN ON--
I SAID, "HELL ON EARTH." I SAID THIS, YES? I SAID YOU NEEDED TO BE STRONG AND THEN YOU--
ARE YOU SERIOUS RIGHT NOW?
HEY!

IF YOU TWO ARE QUITE DONE COMPARING WANDS, WE KINDA NEED TO LEAVE, YEAH?

YES, RIGHT. WELL, IF YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, I'M NOT THE MOST MOBILE CURRENTLY. CAN ONE OF YOU--

--FIX TH...
OOOOKAY. THANK YOU, WANDA.


OF COURSE. WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A RESCUE IF LOKI HAD TO GIVE YOU A PIGGYBACK RIDE, WOULD IT?
NOW THERE'S A VISUAL.

I CAN BREAK THEM AGAIN, IF YOU WISH.
HOW'S BATS?
SHUT UP, LOKI.
SHUT UP, LOKI.

LISTEN...I APPRECIATE THE RESCUE. OF COURSE I DO.
I JUST MEANT, IN THE EVENT THAT YOU ALL GET CAUGHT, THAT--

THAT THE HEAVY HITTERS GETTING THEIR SOULS TAKEN AND GETTING TURNED INTO GHOST RIDERS WOULD BE A MAJOR, GALACTIC-SCALE, WORLD-ANNIHILATING PROBLEM?

WELL, YES...
DON'T WORRY.
WE HAVE A PLAN FOR THAT.

OH. YOU DO?
YES. DON'T GET OUR SOULS STOLEN.
WANDA, THAT IS--

HALLWAY IS FILLED WITH DEMONS. SHALL I SEND THEM TO AN UNFORTUNATE REALM FULL OF INFINITE SCREAMING?
NO, WE CAN'T BE SURE WHICH OF THEM IS HUMAN OR NOT. WE NEED TO FIND ANOTHER WAY DOWN.

OH, WELL, IF THAT'S THE PROBLEM.
LOKI, WAIT!

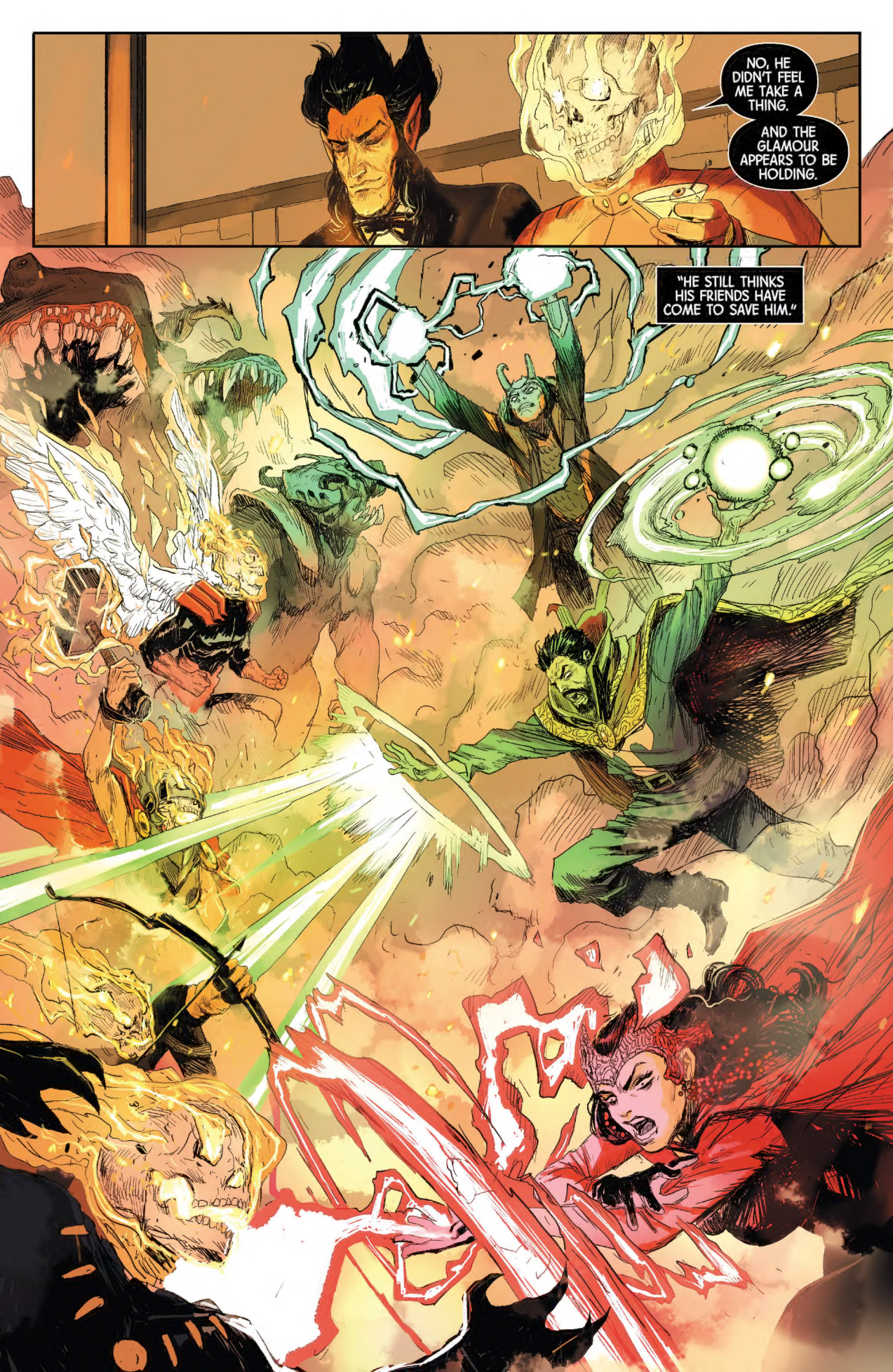
KR-KRASH
FOR THE RECORD, I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE FALL HERE...
WE CAN ALL FLY, TO SOME EXTENT OR ANOTHER.
NO, IT'S MORE THE GENERAL VICINITY OF THE LANDING THAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT.
HAH! SEE--MUCH QUICKER, EH?!
IF WE WEREN'T ALL IN MORTAL DANGER, I'D QUIP SOMETHING ABOUT A HIGHWAY TO HELL, OR GOING FROM THE PAN TO THE FIRE...
AS IT STANDS, ALL I CAN THINK OF IS--
DAMMIT, LOKI!

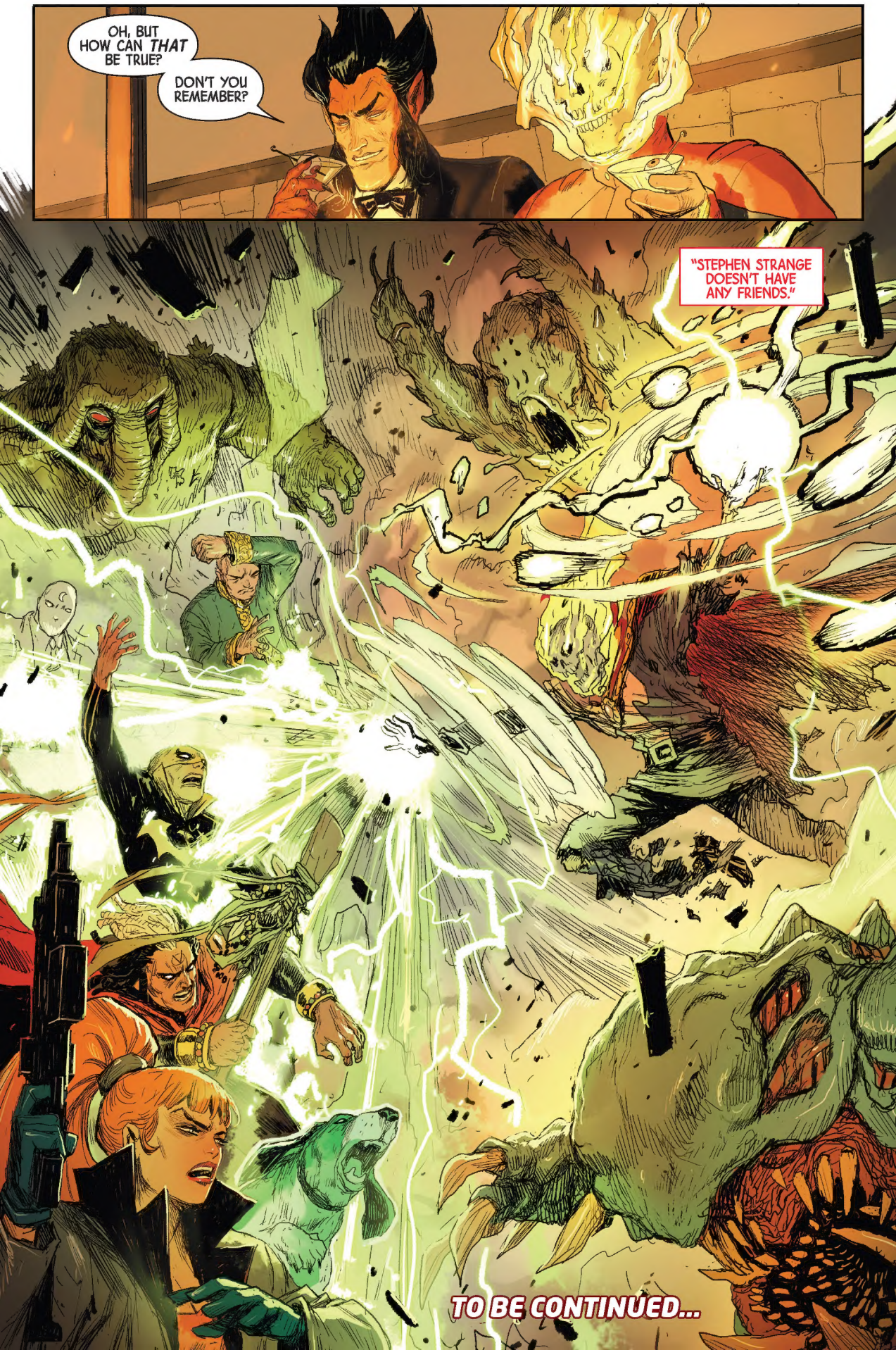
OH, IT'S NOT SO BAD, STEPHEN! HAVE YOU NOT FOUGHT A DEMONIC HORDE BEFORE?
THIS IS WHY YOU WOULD HAVE MADE A LOUSY SORCERER SUPREME, LOKI--NOT EVERYTHING HAS TO BE SO--AGH!--DRAMATIC!
WILL YOU TWO SHUT THE--
STEPHEN!
HELP!!!
CLEA, NO!!!
AGHHH!
OKAY. THAT'S IT.
GET...

...OFF!!!
JEEZ, DOC...
CLEA. THEY TOOK CLEA.
YES, WELL, THAT MAY BE SO...
...BUT WE SEEM TO HAVE MORE PRESSING MATTERS.

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT? JUST WONDERFUL.
I REALLY HAVE MISSED THIS.
YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE I'VE SEEN A GOOD VEGAS SHOW?
I MUST SAY, I HAD MY DOUBTS, DEAR. BUT YOU'VE DONE VERY WELL...
THANK YOU...

I LIVE TO SERVE, MY LORD.
DEAR, PLEASE DO TAKE THAT RIDICULOUS THING OFF, WON'T YOU?
OH, YES. I'M SORRY.
TSSSSSS
BETTER?
MUCH.
I MUST SAY, THE WHOLE "LOOK INTO MY EYES" BIT? EXQUISITE. YOU SOUNDED JUST LIKE HER.
HE REALLY HAS NO IDEA, DOES HE?


NO, HE DIDN'T FEEL ME TAKE A THING.
AND THE GLAMOUR APPEARS TO BE HOLDING.
"HE STILL THINKS HIS FRIENDS HAVE COME TO SAVE HIM."


OH, BUT HOW CAN *THAT* BE TRUE?
DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
"STEPHEN STRANGE DOESN'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS."
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT: A (SOULLESS SORCERER) BOY AND HIS (GHOST) DOG... | **#388** ON SALE IN APRIL!

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